



A Teaching Affiliate
of Harvard Medical School

Oral Chemotherapy

Capecitabine (Xeloda®)

Center for Breast Cancer
Mass General Cancer Center



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Topics to Discuss

- What is oral chemotherapy and how does it work?
- Reasons for taking oral chemotherapy
- Types of oral chemotherapy
- How to take oral chemotherapy
- Storage, Handling, and Disposal
- Drug Interactions
- Side Effects & How to Manage
- Supportive Care Resources
- Your Breast Cancer Team
- When to Call and Important Phone Numbers



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What is oral chemotherapy?

Oral chemotherapy:

- is cancer treatment you take by mouth. It comes in tablet, capsule, or liquid form.
- is just as strong or effective as other forms of chemotherapy.
- may allow for less frequent medical appointments.
- is different from hormone therapy such as tamoxifen or aromatase inhibitors.
- is different from oral targeted cancer therapy.



How does oral chemotherapy work?

Oral chemotherapy:

- works by killing or slowing the growth of cancer cells.
- enters the blood stream and spreads to other areas of the body.
- is most effective when taken as directed by your treatment team.



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Reasons for taking oral chemotherapy

Your treatment team may prescribe oral chemotherapy to control and reduce cancer if you have:

- A personal history of advanced stage breast cancer
 - A personal history of HER2 negative breast cancer with residual disease, or cancer cells that remain after attempts to remove the cancer have been made such as chemotherapy or surgery.
- We will talk with you about how long you will need to take this therapy.

How is capecitabine taken?

- Capecitabine (Xeloda®) is a prodrug of fluorouracil which blocks synthesis of DNA by stopping an enzyme known as thymidylate synthase.
- This stops cancer cells from growing and dividing
- Swallow whole with water and do not break, chew, or crush your tablet
- Take capecitabine with water within 30 minutes of a meal.
- If you miss a dose, skip the dose. Do not take 2 doses at the same time to make up for the missed dose.



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Oral chemotherapy schedule

- You need to follow a specific schedule when taking your oral chemotherapy to make sure that it is safe and effective. Take your medication as directed.
- Your cancer team may modify the dose or schedule based on lab results or side effects.
- For example, a typical “cycle” or schedule of capecitabine is twice daily for 7-14 days, then take 7 days off.

How to keep track of your oral chemotherapy schedule?

- Create a medicine calendar either on paper or in your tablet or phone to keep track of your doses.
- Share the calendar with your treatment team at visits.
- Pill boxes can be used to keep track of your oral chemotherapy doses.
- Do not mix other pills in the box or bottle you use for your oral chemotherapy.



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Example Medication Calendar

*Blank calendar available on last slide

	Date	Time	# of Xeloda Tablets Taken	Comments
Day 1	1/1/2021	8:30 AM 8:30 PM	3 tabs in AM and 3 tabs in PM	Mild nausea – took Compazine x1
Day 2	1/2/2021	8:30 AM 8:30 PM	3 tabs in AM and 3 tabs in PM	
Day 3	1/3/2021	8:30 AM 8:30 PM	3 tabs in AM and 3 tabs in PM	
Day 4	1/4/2021	7:45 AM 8:00 PM	3 tabs in AM and 3 tabs in PM	
Day 5	1/5/2021	8:30 AM ----- PM	3 tabs in AM and 0 tabs in PM	Forgot evening dose – skipped it
Day 6	1/6/2021	8:30 AM 8:30 PM	3 tabs in AM and 3 tabs in PM	
Day 7	1/7/2021	8:30 AM 8:30 PM	3 tabs in AM and 3 tabs in PM	
Day 8		__:__ AM __:__ PM		
Day 9		__:__ AM __:__ PM		
Day 10		__:__ AM __:__ PM		
Day 11		__:__ AM __:__ PM		
Day 12		__:__ AM __:__ PM		
Day 13		__:__ AM __:__ PM		
Day 14		__:__ AM __:__ PM		
Day 15		REST DAYS No Capecitabine (Xeloda®) Tablets		
Day 16				
Day 17				
Day 18				
Day 19				
Day 20				
Day 21				

Storage and Handling of Oral Chemotherapy

- Keep this medicine in its original bottle or separate pill box – do not mix other medications into the pill box.
- Store at room temperature in a dry location away from direct light.
- Keep this medicine out of reach from children and pets.
- Wash your hands before and after handling this medicine.



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Disposal of Oral Chemotherapy

- If you have unused medication, do not throw it in the trash and do not flush it down the sink/toilet
- You may dispose of this medicine by:
 1. Calling your city or county's trash and recycling service for information on hazardous drug take-back programs in your community
 2. Bringing unused oral chemotherapy to MGH and disposing in the blue drug take-back receptacles located outside of the Main Lobby Yawkey elevators or near the retail pharmacy in the Wang building. MGH Waltham does not accept unused oral chemotherapy.
 3. Asking your treatment team or pharmacist for more information.



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Xeloda may have drug interactions

- Some drugs or supplements should not be taken at the same time as other drugs because they can cause side effects or cause the drug to not work well. This is called a drug interaction.
- Some common drug interactions include:
 - Folic acid
 - Alcohol
 - Antacids (ask your team)
 - Warfarin
- Talk with your treatment team or pharmacist before starting any new medications or supplements.
- Tell your treatment team of all prescription and over-the-counter medications (this includes vitamins and herbal products).



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Common Side Effects of capecitabine

- Fatigue or tiredness
- Diarrhea
- Mouth Sores
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Hand and foot skin changes (redness, dryness, peeling)
- Hair thinning
- Lowered blood counts (immune system suppression, anemia, low platelets)



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Managing Diarrhea

- Diet
 - Eat a bland diet that is easy to digest until diarrhea resolves
 - BRAT diet- Bananas, Rice, Applesauce, Toast
 - Do not eat high fiber foods (raw vegetables/fruits, whole grains, nuts, seeds, beans)
 - Do not have dairy, alcohol, caffeine, spicy and fried foods
- Stay hydrated
 - Drink 8-10 glasses (64-80 ounces) of non-caffeinated, non-carbonated beverages daily
 - Gatorade, Pedialyte or other beverages with electrolytes may be recommended with severe diarrhea

Medication for Diarrhea

- Imodium (loperamide) is the medication of choice for diarrhea during cancer treatment. It is available over the counter.
 - Instructions for taking Imodium:
 - Take 2 tablets (4mg) with your first loose/ watery stool.
 - Then take 1 tablet (2mg) with each loose stool thereafter.
 - Do not take more than 8 tablets (16mg) in 24 hours.
 - Contact your care team if you continue to experience diarrhea after taking Imodium for 24 hours.
 - Refer to <https://www.massgeneral.org/assets/MGH/pdf/cancer-center/breast-cancer/bowel-management.pdf> for more information



Managing Mouth Sores

- Perform good mouth care
 - Brush your teeth gently with a soft toothbrush after meals and before bed
 - Floss gently daily
 - Rinse your mouth every 2-3 hours, after meals and before bed (do not use mouthwash with alcohol)
 - Recipes for homemade salt or baking soda rinses
 - ½ teaspoon salt in 8 ounces of water
 - 1 teaspoon baking soda in 8 ounces of water
 - 1 teaspoon salt plus 1 teaspoon baking soda in 32 ounces of water to use throughout the day (make fresh daily)



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Managing Mouth Sores

- Keep your mouth moist
 - Drink water or spray your mouth with water throughout day
 - Drink at least 8 glasses of fluid daily
 - Suck on sugar free candy or chew sugar free gum
 - Moisten lips with plain, nonmedication lip balm (avoid menthol)
- Medication management
 - If your mouth sore pain is severe or interferes with eating, drinking, or swallowing, we may prescribe a numbing mouth rinse or oral pain medication.

Refer to <https://www.massgeneral.org/assets/MGH/pdf/cancer-center/breast-cancer/mouth-care.pdf> for more information on mouth sores



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Managing Nausea

- Take anti-nausea medications as prescribed
- If your appetite is decreased, try eating smaller but more frequent meals (every 2-3 hours) throughout the day
- Avoid fried, overly spicy or fatty foods
- Avoid strong smells
- Try acupuncture or acupressure
- Tell your care team if unable to eat or drink or are vomiting



Managing Hand and Foot Skin Changes

- Apply a thick cream (such as Eucerin, Aveeno, Udderly Smooth, or Lubriderm) to palms and soles of feet at least twice daily.
- Do not wear tight-fitting shoes or socks
- Do not take hot showers or baths, which can dry out your skin.
- Check your palms and soles for any cracks, blisters or peeling skin.
- Call your treatment team if you have peeling, painful cracks, or blisters.



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How to Prevent Infections

- Wash your hands with soap and warm water for 20 seconds after touching surfaces and dry your hands thoroughly afterwards.
- Use a hand sanitizer if you cannot readily wash your hands.
- Avoid having contact with other people who are sick such as with a cold or the flu.
- Avoid being in crowds of people.



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When to call your treatment team

- Fever of 100.5F (38C) or higher
- Uncontrolled diarrhea
- Uncontrolled nausea/vomiting
- Chills
- Bleeding/unusual bruising
- Flu-like symptoms
- Extreme fatigue or weakness
- Cough or shortness of breath
- Rapid heartbeat
- Confusion or agitation
- New or uncontrolled pain
- Problems with urination
- New swelling in arms/legs or face



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Supportive Care Resources

- Yoga
- Acupuncture / Acupressure
- Massage
- Support groups
- Survivorship programs
- Workshops
- Music therapy
- To learn more about all of our of Supportive Care offerings log onto: cancercenterpx.org



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Your Breast Cancer Team

- Oncologist
- Nurse Practitioner
- Pharmacist
- Oncology Social Worker
- Practice Nurse



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Contact Information

- Phone Numbers
 - Boston: 617-726-6500
 - Waltham: 781-487-6100
 - Danvers: 978-882-6060
- Patient Portal:
 - patientgateway.org



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